Sirhan Trial To Begin Today In L.A.

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LOS ANGELES (AP)—Sirhan Bishara Sirhan was to go on trial today in a heavily guarded courtroom on charges he murdered Sen. Robert F. Kennedy but there was a possibility the defense would seek a fourth postponement.

Grant B. Cooper, one of three defense attorneys, said Monday it might be in Sirhan's best interests if the trial were delayed.

Cooper has been ordered to appear this afternoon in U.S. District Court to answer a federal grand jury's questions—which he has said he will not do—or show cause why he should not be held in contempt of court.

Cooper can not be taken off the Sirhan case except at Sirhan's request. Cooper could withdraw, however, another defense attorney, Russell Parsons, has said he would not be willing to proceed without Cooper.

Cooper has said he would refuse to answer grand jury questions on how he came to possess secret transcripts in the Friars' Club card cheating case because of the "lawyer-client" relationships. His client was one of five convicted of cheating club members.

Defense motions and jury selection are expected to take two weeks and presentation of evidence by both sides two months or more. There are indications that more than 200 witnesses will be called.

Sirhan, 24, a Jordanian who came to this country as a boy with his family, is accused of shooting Kennedy last June 5 in a kitchen corridor of the Ambassador Hotel as the New Yorker left a victory celebration following California's Democratic presidential primary.

Five bystanders were wounded, and Sirhan also is being tried on five counts of assault with intent to commit murder.

The trial will be in a tiny armor-plated eighth floor courtroom in the gray-stone, 43-year-old Hall of Justice. Windows have been covered with quarter-inch sheets of steel. Sirhan, arrested at the shooting scene, is held in a heavily guarded cell on the 13th floor.

Judge Herbert V. Walker, 69, dean of the Los Angeles Criminal Division, will hear the trial in Superior Court. Walker decreed the death penalty 21 years ago for Caryl Chessman, convicted kidnap-rapist who died in the gas chamber in 1960 after 12 years of appeals.